



6557

RECREATIONAL
EQUIPMENT, INC.

April 4th, 2011

Chairmen, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. My name is Tessa Bondi, Outreach Specialist for Recreational Equipment, Inc. in West Hartford. Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) is a national retailer of outdoor gear and clothing. Our company is structured as a consumer cooperative meaning that, REI is owned by our 4.4 million active members worldwide, and we share our profits with our members, employees and the communities that we serve.

One of the ways we give back to our communities is through our annual giving program. We have been a part of the West Hartford community since 2007 and we are active in giving back through local grants and the organization of stewardship projects throughout the greater Hartford area. In 2010 alone, REI West Hartford donated \$20,500 to 3 local non-profits involved in promoting volunteerism in the outdoors-Riverfront Recapture here in Hartford, the Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA) in Simsbury, and the Connecticut Forest and Park Association (CFPA) were our recipients last year. Additionally, we promoted and rallied volunteers for various volunteer opportunities in the outdoors throughout the region.

REI operates retail stores across the country, 2 in Connecticut, and our mission is to "Inspire, Educate and Outfit for a lifetime of outdoor adventure and stewardship".

I live in West Hartford, and I am an active outdoor enthusiast who enjoys the various public recreational amenities that our community and state provides. I'm here today to speak in favor of House Bill 6557 which I believe helps ensure access to our public recreational places in Connecticut. As a business person it's critical that our customers have places close to home in which to enjoy the outdoors and the products that we sell. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation nationally generates \$730 billion in economic activity and generates over 6 million jobs. In New England, the association reports \$23 billion in economic activity and 270,000 jobs attributable to outdoor recreation.

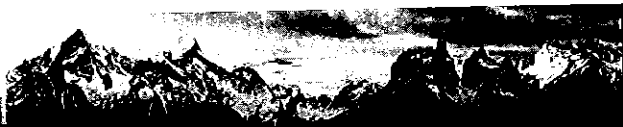


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Industry research also shows that having recreation opportunity nearby is very important for the ability to recreate, but it also ensures a high quality of life which allows people to be active and healthy. Close-to-home recreation is an essential way in which to expose people to the outdoors. With participation in many outdoor activities in decline, and with soaring inactivity and obesity rates especially among our young people, it has never been more important to ensure people have access to the outdoors and abundant recreation opportunities.

HB 6557 provides the immunity for municipalities under the Recreational Lands Use Act that helps ensure access to recreation areas. This bill restores this necessary immunity to municipalities and is consistent with the way in which the law views private landowners and the state. Last year the Metropolitan District in West Hartford considered closing a recreational area that attracts more than 200,000 visitors a year and is within a 1.5 miles of our store for lack of this immunity, and we believe similar concerns would play out across the state without the protection afforded in H.B. 6557.

Thank you.



We inspire, educate and outfit for a lifetime of outdoor adventure